

# COLORADO WATER PLAN



## ROBUST AGRICULTURE

Colorado's agriculture sector and food supply value chain faces a variety of ongoing water resource challenges affecting its viability, which is defined as the ability to sustain profitable farm enterprises. These challenges include climate change, drought, extreme weather events, buy-and-dry pressure, and aging infrastructure. While the Water Plan creates pathways for addressing these challenges, the following represent key themes that the Water Plan update must consider.

### EMERGING CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- **ECONOMIC VIABILITY & RESILIENCY** - Water, as an important economic asset, will present challenges and opportunities as availability declines. Colorado will work alongside the agriculture and food sectors, and the communities that depend on them, in adaptive planning for a hotter and drier future. Through these efforts, opportunities such as connecting growing demand for local food with the transition to lower-water crops can develop new market pathways for agricultural operations and community infrastructure, while maximizing remaining water supplies.
- **INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS & ON-FARM IMPROVEMENTS** - Developing supplemental irrigation or augmentation supplies, implementing soil health practices, reducing delivery losses and supporting innovative groundwater management solutions are critical to Colorado agriculture. Colorado must continue to invest in on-farm efficiency improvements where appropriate and practices that build adaptive capacity to drought and other water stressors.
- **HIGHLIGHT PRIMARY & SECONDARY AGRICULTURAL BENEFITS** - Agriculture uses the majority of water in the state but much of that water returns to aquifers and rivers to be used downstream. This provides several public benefits such as food production, return flows and wildlife habitat. Voluntary ecosystem market programs can help agricultural producers maintain or enhance these benefits while diversifying income.
- **INFRASTRUCTURE ENHANCEMENTS** - To meet future and existing needs, infrastructure enhancements need to be considered. This may include expanding existing storage, adding new storage, reducing water loss, infrastructure modernization, and establishing increasingly adaptive operations. Securing adequate funding to support all aspects of irrigation infrastructure development is critical.

### ▶ NEW TOOLS & INITIATIVES

#### ATM Status Update

A report called *Alternative Transfer Methods in Colorado, Status Update* was released in July 2020. This report acknowledges dry-up will likely continue due to various market drivers, but recommends continued investment in ATMs because they provide a flexible and creative approach to avoid permanent dry-up and support various Water Plan goals.

#### Engagement Workshops

In the first half of 2021, five workshops are planned to share developing ideas and gather input for the treatment of various agricultural initiatives in the Water Plan update.

#### State Financial Assistance

Various forms of financial assistance are available to support multi-benefit irrigation infrastructure and water conservation projects through Water Plan Grants administered by CWCB. The Colorado Department of Agriculture ACRE3 program, which promotes renewable energy and water/energy efficiency projects for Colorado's agricultural producers and processors is also a valuable resource.

